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ABSTRACT

Problems of cross-cultural communication can easily be found in the classrooms of a pluralistic society, exemplified by Hawaii, where students come from many ethnic backgrounds. While the institutional setting of the classroom may demand certain types of communicative and learning behaviors--aggressive, competitive, and verbally outspoken--many nonwhite students view this style of communication as being "haolified," a pejorative term indicating behavior typical of Caucasians. Consequently, the environment of the student outside of the classroom reinforces behaviors incompatible with the culture of the school, thus causing academic failure which has a parellel in the larger social and economic concerns of adulthood. Aggressive competition as cultural imperative has been institutionalized, effectively impeding the social mobility and well being of groups such as the native Hawaiian. Solutions to this problem must involve both personal and institutional change. (MKM)

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Communicating in a Pluralistic Community: The Model of Hawaii's Ethnic Relations

Americans have increasingly become sensitive to the fact that their society is not only largely democratic but pluralistic. That we are a "nation of immigrants," of native and sojourner, is an indisputable sociological reality. And in this heterogeneity of American society, especially symbolized in the Island community of Hawaii, resides both the potential energy and impotencies of multi-cultural systems. On the one hand Americans can draw from their ethnic heritages the personal alternatives necessary to cope with current social and psychological pressures. "Ethnic identity" can be a meaningful salve for social alienation and disorientation. But their cultural diversities can also exacerbate the jealousies, the hatreds springing from a primordial fear of the "other," the "different." As Americans take growing pride in their varying cultural idiosyncrasies, the lesson from Babel appears all too ominously. To what extent can a people speak different tongues, worship different gods, pursue different dreams and still find that they have an ability to share a common knowledge harmoniously? Communication rapidly transforms into a question of the "ability to communicate" in a multi-cultural society, of coherently expressing ideas, wants and desires in a cross-cultural context.

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Developing such an "ability to communicate" in a pluralistic society devolves first upon exploring the cultural imperative in human interaction. No universal language, no universal value or conception of reality naturally binds the citizenry of a heterogenous community to a universal meaning. To the contrary, varying cultural values, beliefs and customs, differentiating ethnic groups and individuals, seem the resilient human proclivity. As much as we would like to think of different cultural groups as being "brothers and sisters under the skin," such a well-intentioned reverie dangerously ignores the diversity, not uniformity, endemic to the human condition. Experience, after all, reveals that the behaviors of various peoples are indeed different. Their notions about the content of "communication," "discussion," "giving their two cents worth and being heard," are as multifarious as their more ethereal "world views." As Edward Hall in The Silent Language has so perceptively demonstrated, we individually possess a body language, a style of communication dependent on several cultural variables. Indeed, the cultural imperative in communication defines the "nature of the givens" not as a one-way communicative avenue, but a complex radial grid of multi-dimensional cues and messages.

An example of how the cultural imperative affects communication is found in a multi-cultural setting of the Hawaiian classroom. A frequent stereotypic complaint of teachers at both the college and public school revolves around the problem of communication in classroom discussions. Japanese students are too

quiet--Haole students are too boisterous--Hawaiian students are too passive. Useful communication is frequently impossible. Of course each from their own perspective are "communicating" in ways culturally condoned in the home, among their peers or according to their "world view." But their mutually exclusive notions of "how to behave properly" have little if any common ground upon which students and teachers can effectively exchange ideas. Such a condition of communication in the pluralistic setting does not lead naturally to mutual-understanding across the gulf of cultural imperatives.

In the race conscious 1970's the recognition of cultural differences between ethnic groups is becoming an everyday perception and problem. It has become gauche to suggest that in reality "we are all American's," or "cut from the same cloth." Bilingualism and ethnic heritage units in the schools, Black, Yellow, Brown and Red power political movements have repeatedly proselytized the need and pride in being different. "Culture," "ethnicity," "culture shock," "cross-cultural communication" have become almost overused terms describing the American Dilemma. Hardly a magazine is published, a college course taught or a humanist symposium conducted that some aspect of ethnicity isn't included as a testament to our enrapture with cultural imperatives. Americans are straining to discover the intrinsic individualities that separate them--and struggling to uncover the means to facilitate communicating beyond those differences. In doing so, though, the dialogue must go beyond anthropological issues of how many colors Japanese, Polynesians, Filipinos or Caucasians see in the rainbow or speculative questions of what the American Black, Australian aborigine or Mohawk <u>really</u> means when they say "communicate." Questions dealing with the implications of institutionalized cultural suppression must also be raised if the "ability to communicate" is to be thoroughly developed. For the cultural imperative can

become systematically incorporated into daily patterns of life resulting in several forms of subtle social suppression. Cultural values intertwined with economic, educational or political institutions result in the divestment of certain groups' "rights" and "abilities" to communicate.

This invidious dimension of the American "Dilemma" must be understood as based not only on the territorial and monetary imperative of political and economic systems but on specific cultural imperatives continually defining "good" behaviors and values. Those ethnic groups who view these same values and behaviors as "good" assimilate into social, financial and political power--they come to possess the "rights" and "abilities" of communication. Those who pursue other cultural "goods" not conducive to American institutions, those whose cultural mazeway conflicts with the dominant culture's mazeway, fall to the wayside--unemployed, in many cases unemployable, without educational, political or financial access to any of the "open" channels of communication. They become the "culturally deprived," a dehumanizaing euphemism implying a people who have no culture.

The imperilment of certain ethnic groups' "ability to communicate" can again be illustrated in the Hawaiian classroom. The institutional setting of the classroom naturally expects and demands certain types of communicative and learning behaviors so as to meet certain cultural assumptions. The system expects the students to become aggressive, competitive and verbally outspoken--behaviors essential to perpetuate an assumptive American self-image. Many non-white students demanded to compete in such a manner view this style of communication as being "haolified," a pejorative term indicating behavior unapproved by their peers. Consequently, the environment of the student outside

of the classroom reinforces behaviors incompatible with the culture of the school. Without the necessary incentive to engage in "haolified" behaviors, and punished by his peers and home if he should, many local students refrain from participating in class. So doing, they abdicate any access to classroom rewards, accentuating their own sense of failure as well as reinforcing the system's treatment of them as "deprived," "retarded" or "non-achieving." While certainly a highly generalized paradigm, this educational problem has implications for the institutional dimension of the cultural imperative, and its resulting influence on communication. A cycle of failure, resentment and more failure is perpetuated through an inability to openly and reciprocially communicate in a cross-cultural institution.

This classroom situation also has a parallel in the greater social arena. After all, children do eventually matriculate into adulthood, carrying with them the tools or maladjustments of their adolescent education. As would be true of Blacks or Chicanos on the mainland, the Hawaiian, for example, finds that in Hawaii a cultural imperative has been institutionalized to impede his social mobility and well-being. Although the oldest ethnic group in residence, the Hawaiian repeatedly appears on the lower curves of the education, economic and mobility statistical graphs. Aggressive competition eroding coherent family structures, a sacrifice of affiliative friendships for material achievements have long been recognized as the price the native Hawaiian has had to pay for the "tragedy of assimilation." Those who do pay the price have frequently found later that the cost to ethnic pride and dignity was perhaps too great.

This dilemma that the institutionalized cultural imperative poses to a pluralistic community can be perplexing. The cultural "outsider" wants a greater share of the power distribution in society while at the same time maintaining

a distinct cultural integrity and ethnic identity. The cultural "insider", naturally desiring to retain their beneficial social position, assume that "one culture" for any system is entirely enough and that the "outsider" should strive to become the "same" as everyone else. Derived from these both self-aggrandizing attitudes have emerged certain remedial alternatives hoping to redefine "ethnicity" in modern America.

The first, historically-tested solution, is to return to a single notion of culture, conducive to American institutions and imposed upon diverse people. Uniformity, not diversity, is the only way in which to cope with a system comprised of over two hundred million Americans. The centrifugal impulse pulling people apart, however, seems to mitigate against such a return to extensive Americanization campaigns--the insidious effects of cultural imposition have been reviled by the bitcerness and frustrations of the immigrant generations. The second, currently more chic solution, is to return to some nostalgic notion of culture before assimilation and American competition inflicted their damage on agrarian or native peoples. As tempting as the myth of the return to a golden age might be, it negates the harder bread-and-butter issues. Encouraging children to isolate themselves in a Cultural Oz ill-prepares them for the type of technological society in which the future will unfold. There are certain intuitive meanings irreplaceable in the hula, the tea-ceremony, the yamulka and the shillelagh. But those ephemeral symbols alone cannot replace the payroll check, provide literacy or satisfy the needs of the dinner table. Other social tools not supplied by "ethnic heritage" are prerequisite to survival. The withdrawal into cultural isolation for most ethnic groups will eventually mean that they become atavistic museum pieces wholly supported through the munificence of a patron.

The pendulum usually finds its repose in the balance of forces. The educator, the humanist, the social scientist, the parent and the layman will most likely find agreement that the first two alternatives are both undesireable and unacceptable. The first degrades the individual by attempting to tamper with his cultural integrity, by turning him into something he is not. The second equally degrades the human being by depriving him of the technological and economic autonomy necessary for full democratic participation in society--it relegates him to a paternalistic role in a static world. And both, by either a denial or overemphasis on ethnicity do not suggest solutions to the greater problem--how harmony in pluralism can be achieved with a maximum allowance for cultural diversity.

More plausibly, the solution to reconciling institutionalized cultural imperatives with wider social participation will necessitate both a restructuring of various cultural values and institutions so as to diffuse the ability of individuals to maximize their communication potentials. First the cultural "outsider," if he chooses greater social equality, must recognize that culture is not static but dynamic. "Ethnicity" to be viable cannot be a concept which clings to a past era, but must supply individuals with useful tools and knowledge. Behaviors or cultural responses which become archaic, losing any relevant sociological or psychological function, can be supplemented by new behaviors without a necessary loss of "ethnic integrity"--assimilation in a responsible and constructive manner, not coerced under an atmosphere of "inferior", need not always be a "tragedy." The issue of "pidgin" English usage in Hawaii is a useful illustration of how cultural expansion can enhance one's ability to communicate. Only the most irresponsible would argue that for Island children "pidgin" English could become the exclusive lingua franca. While in certain contexts, "pidgin" usage

enhances communication though arousing connotative affiliations of "localness," and should not be discouraged, the child equipped only with "pidgin" will continually stand outside the educational and economic mainstream of his society. In the Global Village, communicating and economic survival demands an ability to speak and write competently in Standard English. Competent multi-lingualism, not a careless reinforcement of language enclaves, is necessary if a group is to exercise skills of self-autonomy in a Hawaii moving even closer to the world-wide influences of media, economy and power structures.

And as the "outsider" chooses to temper his ethnic uniqueness to become more communicative within a common social framework, institutions must also bend to accommodate a plurality of cultural inputs. The institutionalized cultural imperative must be relaxed to allow for greater participation of the "outsider." Recognition in the Islands, for example, that the system of ukupau is efficient as well as compatible with a diverse Hawaiian lifestyle is a significant reappraisal of our traditional institutions in accordance with cultural diversity. Ukupau is a system whereby workers are paid on a piece-work basis rather than on a time basis. Instead of working on an 8 to 5 daily time schedule, this system allows Island sanitation workers to complete their daily assigned tasks at their own speed. So if in six hours the sanitation workers can do the same amount of work that otherwise would take a ten-hour work day, they would nonetheless be paid for the ten hour day, allowing for a free afternoon. The Hawaiian lifestyle, insensitive to the need to work according to an imposed notion of time, is, in this case, made an integral and workable alternative in traditional institutions.

This incorporation of cultural diversity in our social systems can possibly be extended in a like manner to other environments and situations. In the Island classroom perhaps the best communicative environment is not always

the traditional teacher-to-student authoritarian dialogue. Perhaps some students would respond more fruitfully given newer, more creative institutional assumptions about the best type of interaction in a pluralistic setting. The College of Education, the Department of Education and individual teachers are currently struggling to facilitate learning in the pluralistic classroom with a variety of experimental tools. Ultimately their success will depend on public and parental support for their work, and the sensitivity of their new tools to the underlying cultural assumptions.

The public media, the political process, the economic system, land usage and welfare programs are but a few more institutions demanding similar reexamination. How these institutions could be altered to meet wider cultural inputs is an answer coming from greater action, dialogue and participation of all of Hawaii's citizenry. Of course the "nuts and bolts" issues are unanswered by many of these admittedly idealistic generalities. But self-criticism among those who have "made it," the "insider" whose cultural values and communication skills are productive in traditional institutions, is a beginning step towards reappraising systems and accommodating varying cultural inputs. And as a consequence those who are "insiders" need not necessarily feel that by so diversifying institutions they must also incur a personal sacrifice. The motivation for social change need not be a paternalistic instinct for the "outsider." Nor must the "insider" respond to the "outsider" merely out of fear of survival. To seek social progress with the attitude that "unless something is done the poor are going to take away our homes" is a form of negative reinforcement with dubious consequences. Repression of the "outsider" is the most likely result of emphasizing that poverty, frustration and overpopulation threatens the "insider" unless social progress ensues.

In a more positive sense, those who are "insiders" can be shown that in a society of immigrants and natives, all people are interdependent with each other for social needs and rewards. To adapt to an uncertain future the Island community requires the widest range of cultural resources to help shape and direct institutions. The list is nearly inexhaustible of the crisis areas daily intensified by a blindness to the possible cultural alternatives awaiting a truly pluralistic society. Respect for the natural environment, the effective use of leisure time, a reevaluation of senseless competition and the advantageous values of cooperation, obligation to community, political integrity, family coherency, spiritual harmony, the conflict of the generations and the care for the elderly, to name but a few modern industrial crisises, are frequently unresolved, even worsened, by the cultural imperatives of the "insiders." But viable social alternatives in the Asian value system, the Polynesian or Filipino family, the rich human resources in the Island community are potentially useful to provide the stability and humanism for a society pragmatic in its outlook. The search for answers to American needs often begins with an examination of the valuable inputs possible by those once recognized as "outsiders," the "deprived."

In the course of recognizing the real contributions of diverse cultural imperatives to a more rewarding society, one outcome will be an unprecedented exercise in intercultural communication and the development of institutionally-based common experiences and values between people. Through need, interdependency and respect the "ability to communicate" in a pluralistic society will evolve, hopefully, into a mundane rather than impossible exercise. What will be necessary, of course, will be at several levels a commitment to responsible social reconstruction. Culture, ethnic identity and assimilation will need to lose the attached stigmas of nostalgia, racial hatred, inferiority and a fear of change

and growth. Institutions will need to be continually democraticized, extending "rights to communicate" and incorporating diverse cultural values. And a recognition that all parts and groups in a society are interdependent to contribute to advancing new social directions will be the creative image, the meaningful goal, of a people who hope to accurately call themselves "free", "democratic" and "progressive."